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ABSTRACT

Addressed primarily to library educators and to public librarians who have responsibility for disseminating general information to the public, this paper proposes to make a link between the absence of general lifelong learning about Pacific Rim countries among the general public, and the congruent requirement which that absence implies for the training of library professionals. The Pacific Rim includes the more than 30 nations that border the Pacific including Latin America, the United States, Canada, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, many Asian nations, Australia, and the Pacific islands. Issues related to international or transborder flow of information as related to technological and political problems and constraints on governments and the private sector are important, but the focus of this paper is on a simpler task: determining how ordinary individuals in all Pacific Rim countries may become better informed in general terms about each other. It is suggested that public librarians (and library schools which educate future staff members) should: develop broader general collection development policies; seize opportunities to develop collaboration between international and regional groups outside the library profession (e.g., the Pacific Telecommunications Council and the Pacific Alliance for Educators); seek sponsorship for an increase in international internships; identify and use others' systems and programs that are appropriate for specific populations; and regularize gift exchanges and technological sharing. (THC)

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INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION AND THE PUBLIC

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The lack of easily accessible general international information to the populations of the USA and other countries requires more technical and continuing education for library staffs so they can augment such services.

I propose in these few minutes to make a link between the general lifelong information learning about Pacific Rim countries that is sorely missing among our public and their publics, and the congruent requirement which that implies for the training of our library profession to provide this information. My remarks are therefore addressed primarily to library educators, and to public librarians or those who have responsibility for disseminating general information to the public.

The over 30 nations that border the Pacific include those from Latin America, The USA and Canada, The USSR, many Asian nations, Australia, and both nations and possessions of other countries that are Pacific islands. The scope and variety are enormous.

California is a Pacific Rim "nation" in itself: our population is characterized by a constant mix and flow of migrants, of immigrants, of refugees, and of visitors. We share technology and we have technical exchange programs. California's commerce, and agriculture are increasingly involved with Pacific Rim nations - Governor George Deukmejian in 1985 at the Pacific Rim Expo in Long Beach said: "Last year, California's two-way trade (with the Pacific Rim nations) reached an all time high of $85 billion." He also said: "...few of us have any problem understanding the tremendous significance of this region to our state, our nation, our economy, our culture, and to our goal of a free and prosperous future for

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every resident of California."[1]

Governors of the other Western States on the Pacific (Hawaii, Alaska, Washington and Oregon) would undoubtedly echo that statement.

However that statement was addressed to people in commerce and trade. Most other such statements are also directed toward groups or readers with a vital and special interest in timely, accurate communication and information that will help carry out the activities of governments and the private sector.

It follows that most discussion about international or trans-border flow of information involves itself with technological and political problems and constraints on governments and the private sector.

I want frankly to skirt those thorny and well-recognized issues and suggest we focus on a simpler task: how shall ordinary individuals in all our countries just become better informed in general terms about each other?

As a rule the public does not have easy access to information that would produce clear understanding of other countries, or their goals, cultures and points of view. There are serious consequences for all of us in the ignorance of the USA public respecting other countries and cultures. There are also needs by inhabitants of other countries to understand us better - and not only in terms of their most often-stated need, which is also not being met: that of orienting them as prospective newcomers to the U.S.

It is likely that to a large degree, the general populations of other countries suffer information impoverishment about other nations too. In the USA, the public receives little depth information from television - most of that is crisis-oriented news: the Mexican economy; The New Caledonia rebellion; or Southeast Asian wars will serve as recent examples.

The public, if it reads the newspaper, rarely is informed, over time, about issues in our neighbors' countries, and almost never from the point of view of their inhabitants. A San Francisco Project called Bay Area and the World published in 1982 an Analysis of International News Coverage by the major News Media of the San Francisco Bay Area. It found a serious paucity of

coverage by all those newspapers. It also noted that the public readership was not stimulated to take an interest in such coverage because the link between a given interest of an individual (imported automobiles, visiting lecturers) and the given country were not made by the media.

Somewhat more assiduous information seekers will read special articles in newspapers and periodicals, such as features produced by Pacific News Service, and other agencies and special correspondents.

And ardent seekers of information will find special-interest material produced by governments, or banks or trade journals, special libraries and the like.

It would seem that the USA public, poorly educated as is now generally recognized, in general knowledge of the rest of the world, is not helped much by the information channels that exist.

There's the challenge to our profession. What shall public libraries (and the library schools that educate their staffs) do about this? I don't even ask <u>if</u> they should - of course they should - in a world in which the USA is deeply involved in many facets of the interests of other countries, it is mandatory that libraries play a role in helping educate the adult and youth populations about that world. I recommend that at a minimum and immediately library schools make their students aware of this challenge. Library staffs throughout the world must then also be better educated to acquire materials and offer services and programs that will partially satisfy the public's need to know, or stimulate a thirst for knowledge.

For their part, public librarians must direct some attention to recognition of the information gaps I've described, and develop some modest steps to correct them: general collection development of materials, but not confined as they often are to such as <u>special</u> Asian, or <u>special</u> latino projects; seizing more opportunities to develop collaborations that international and regional groups outside our own profession could provide us (the Pacific Telecommunications Council, the Pacific Alliance for Educators, and the Organization of American States are examples); seeking serious sponsorship for a heavy increase in international internships, <u>not</u> just to the USA or from the USA to tell others about U.S. library technology but also to <u>learn</u>

from others; identifying and using each others' systems and programs (here I am thinking for example of a library literacy program in California that will adopt and adapt the literacy program of the Mexican government). Gifts exchange and technological sharing are already in place for mutual benefit and need to be regularized and increased. These are neutral helpful activities in international arenas that might avoid some of the political and technical problems that certainly do exist.

International librarianship, as coursework in our schools, and as practiced in our international associations, is of course a most valuable resource. We need to bring it to the basic local level of information service so that the people in all our countries receive its expertise. I suspect that modest regionally-focussed, and topically-focussed projects are more susceptible of success that are massive international activities. Given the distances among us, even these require very special sustained efforts to accomplish concrete objectives .

Most of you have for years been active in international projects. I know those have ranged from highly sophisticated complex undertakings to simple but effective services. The mechanisms and intentions to increase international information flow are in place.

Bringing my focus back to the Pacific Rim, I do wish to stress that regional interests naturally govern activities in information services and continuing education. That is why this panel has been developed. The Pacific United States has much in common with those other 30 nations that the rest of the U.S. does not share. This is probably true also of western Mexico, Canada and Colombia; also of eastern USSR, or northern Australia. The seats of national governments may be considerably removed from the focus of a regional concern.

A recent article in the Sacramento (California) Bee cited the fact that U.S. national news is very east-coast oriented. It said: "For the New York Times (our most prominent national newspaper) New York still remains the measure of an event's significance" and further, the "quality of...western coverage has at best been uneven".[2] I would have to agree with that. Only by reading the Honolulu Advertiser was I exposed to many Pacific issues that don't reach even California!

For these reasons, the five State Libraries of Hawaii, Alaska, Washington, Oregon and California are beginning to explore avenues by which we can improve Pacific Rim information flow. A small international planning and sharing meeting in Los Angeles in 1983 identified a host of topics for mutual work in our profession. High on the list was the need for expansion of our own continuing education. That group, now expanded, continues to communicate and seek ways to work together.

For a long time the University of Hawaii Library School has sponsored education activities in the Pacific;Washington Library Network counts among its participants Australia, New Zealand, Philippines and others. California is preparing its second Binational Library Conference with Mexico; and a working group called Pan Pacific Interlibrary Connections has been formed within the Pacific Telecommunications Council.

We in California are considering piloting very simple public library-sponsored projects on two-way information services with selected other countries. And the State Libraries have an extensive file of librarians from other countries who are saying, as are we all here today, that we must get to know each other more, collaborate on specifics, and improve our abilities to serve our populations with the information they need.

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[1] Speech, Pacific Rim Expo Dinner, May 20, 1985, Long Beach, California

[2] Forum, Sacramento Bee, June 9, 1985. "The Media Myopia in Megapolis" by Bob Gottlieb and Peter Wiley.